Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice

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Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice (II-RP)

Published on-line at http://www.iiirg.org/journal

What Works in Investigative Interviewing? Using Systematic Maps to Examine the Evidence-base

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Introduction

Competent investigative interviewing skills are key to securing reliable information from victims, witnesses, informants, and suspects. Information obtained in interviews often plays an important role in directing an investigation, informing effective decision-making, promoting efficient allocation of resources, as well as securing reliable prosecutions and mitigating risk of miscarriages of justice. However, effective investigative interviewing is a complex skill to master; demanding a sound understanding of the many cognitive, social, and environmental factors that influence the content and accuracy of witness and suspect accounts (Gabbert & Hope, 2018; Hope & Gabbert, 2019).

To ensure that investigative interviewing and intelligence gathering produces usable, credible, and reliable information in an effective and ethically defensible manner, training and practice must be evidence-based. This short article outlines how practitioners, trainers and policy makers can navigate the best available research evidence to evaluate 'what works?' in investigative interviewing.

How Can Policy-Makers and Practitioners Assess the Research Evidence Base?

Scientific research can be used to determine whether a particular method, tool, or technique is effective in producing the desired outcome. For example, in the context of investigative interviewing, one might to consult the relevant literature to answer questions such as 'How can I build rapport to encourage trust and cooperation?', 'Which question types are most effective in eliciting information?', or 'How can I strategically use available evidence in a suspect interview?'.

It is important that the research consulted is of good quality to ensure the reported findings are reliable. Checks should be made that studies have been carefully conducted, using appropriate research methods and analyses, and that the researchers are transparent about any limitations, and how the conclusions were reached. Studies that have been peer-reviewed prior to being published in a good scientific journal are likely to be of higher quality than self-published research, such as research only reported in book chapters (which may not have been subjected to peer review) or in blogs or other non-peer review formats. Research findings are particularly

compelling when replicated, or when similar conclusions are reported across several studies. Therefore, when examining the relevant literature to find out 'what works' it is important that there is at least a small body of research to help inform decisions.

Searching for Relevant Research

Effective decision-making and evidence-based practice should be informed by considering *all* available (g00d quality) research that addresses the topic of interest, rather than selecting one or two studies on a topic. Strict criteria should be applied to identify relevant studies and exclude studies that do not meet pre-set quality and methodological requirements. The steps include (a) identifying relevant keywords, and appropriate Boolean operators, (b) performing keyword searches of scientific databases (e.g., the Global Policing Database, Science Direct, Web of Science, Google Scholar), (c) taking steps to identify additional studies via other sources, (d) screening the studies to ensure they satisfy a pre-determined inclusion strategy, and (e) assessing the quality of the remaining studies. In sum, systematic review principles are important to make sure that the entire process is objective and transparent, and that any potential bias is minimised.
Figure 1 below illustrates this systematic search process; the data shown are from the recent Authorised Professional Practice guidelines relating to 'Obtaining initial accounts from victims and witnesses' (College of Policing, 2018). This example shows how extensive an evidence review can be, with initial searching returning thousands of studies before sifting, rating, and reviewing returns a smaller number of studies that comprise the best available research evidence to answer the question.

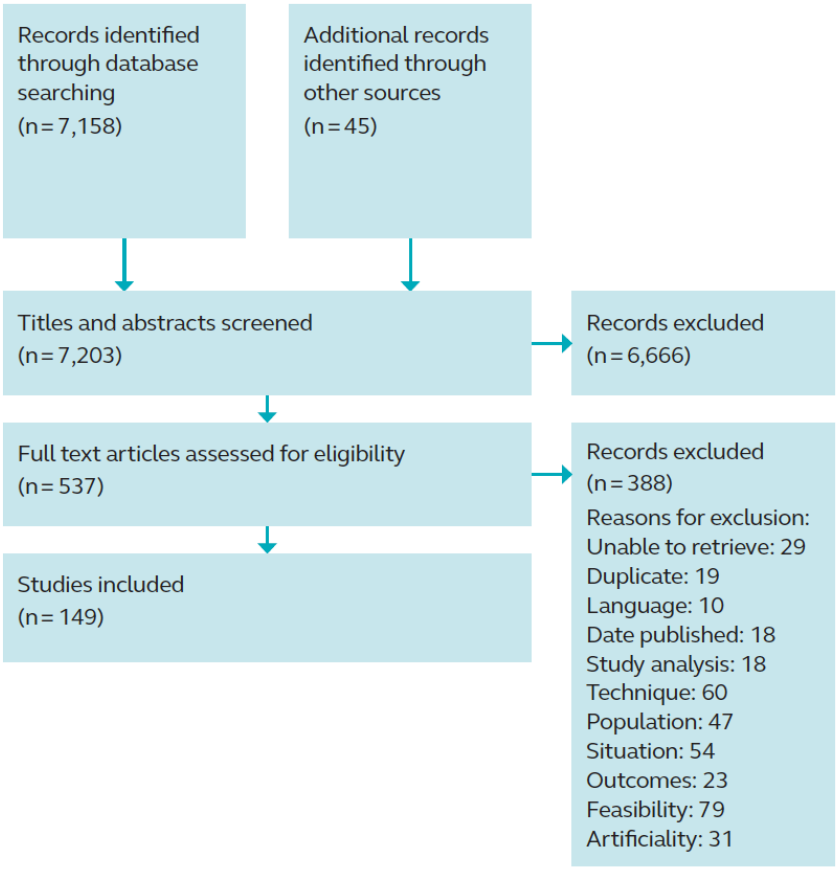

Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart outlining key phases of the systematic review process. Reproduced with permission from the College of Policing (2019).

Systematically Mapping and Reviewing the Research Literature

Systematically 'mapping' research on a particular topic allows for transparent and comprehensive evidence collation and visual presentation of the current evidence-base, which in turn provides an objective and detailed picture of the current state of knowledge.
Mapping is a method of cataloguing study attributes, such as methodologies, independent and dependent variables, and different areas of study focus (see James, Randall, & Haddaway, 2016). Taking this approach, it is possible to effectively map the breadth and depth of relevant literature and, thus, facilitate the identification of knowledge-clusters, as well as areas within the literature base that have been neglected. Using this methodology, it is also possible to examine, compare, and contrast different methods used by researchers to manipulate and measure variables of interest. Systematic maps can provide the foundations to support the conduct of a thorough review of the literature, in the course of which the research evidence on a particular topic can be summarised, and questions relating to 'what works' can be fully explored.

Systematic Maps Available on the iIIRG Website (Member's Area)

Two Searchable Systematic Maps are available to members of iIIRG to help practitioners and academics review the research evidence in the areas of (a) interviewing witnesses, and (b) rapport techniques used in information elicitation contexts. These Searchable Systematic Maps provide researchers, practitioners, and policy makers with an easy way to examine the breadth and depth of existing research, and to identify gaps in the evidence base.
The map summarising research on the topic of interviewing witnesses includes both experimental and field studies that have been published in peer-reviewed journals. The studies include different types of investigative interview techniques and/or their associated components, as well as interviewee-related factors (such as age or vulnerability), and interviewer-related factors (such as whether the interviewer is present, or whether a same vs. different interviewer is used across multiple interviews).

The map summarising research relating to the impact of rapport on disclosure contains published and non-published research (e.g., PhD theses). It presents key variables relating to rapport-behaviours that have been manipulated or observed, and outcome variables such as the type of information disclosure. Note that for a study to be included in the map, it is not necessary for the research to have shown that rapport successfully influenced disclosure. For example, a study manipulating rapport with the objective of demonstrating an increase in the amount of disclose would be included in the Systematic Map regardless of whether rapport actually increased disclosure, decreased disclosure, or had no significant effect on what the interviewee reported.

Guide to using the systematic maps.

Each Systematic Map has been created in Excel in the format of a searchable database. Each of the rows in the database represents an eligible study. The columns represent methodological details relating to each study, including the independent and dependent variables. To search for studies of interest in either Systematic Map, first identify the column/s of interest, click on the grey filter button containing an arrow, and then select the option/s required from the drop-down menu. For example, in the rapport database, if only studies from the domain of

Criminal Justice are of interest, then this can be selected from the options available in the relevant column, after which the database will only show relevant studies that meet this preference. Options can be selected from multiple columns at once, thus refining the search outcomes further. For example, it is possible to first select studies from the field of Criminal Justice (as described above), and then select options from one or more further columns (e.g., filtering for studies with adults, and/or studies that have featured 'active listening' as a rapport behaviour). Again, once selected filters have been applied the database will only show the relevant studies that meet these preferences. To return to the full list, 'unfilter' the selections by clicking on each filter button used (identifiable by a filter icon next to the arrow) and clicking on the 'clear filter' box.

Maintenance of systematic maps.

Once a systematic review of the literature has been conducted, and a systematic map created, it is important to keep the map up to date or it loses its value.
Members of iIIRG can help keep these existing maps up to date with this by completing an online form to inform us about any studies (perhaps new work or else research we may have inadvertently overlooked) that you believe should be included. As long as the research meets our inclusion criteria we will be delighted to add it to the Systematic Map(s).
Keeping the maps updated will ensure that this valuable resource remains beneficial for all users.

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Acknowledgements

The Interviewing Witnesses Systematic Map was commissioned and funded by the College of Policing in March 2016. Permission to reproduce Figure 1 was given by the College of Policing in April 2019.The Rapport and Disclosure Systematic Map was commissioned and funded by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) in September 2017.

